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ABSTRACT

This document presents a review of the literature that examines the relationship of spiritual centeredness to the development of a positive self-concept and good mental health, emphasizing the Judeo-Christian concept of spirituality, but discussing other concepts as well. The review focuses on three areas: coping skills, self-concept, and values development. Articles reviewed were located through a search of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system and the ALICE system at the Ohio University library, using the headings "Religion or Religious," "Mental Health," and "Education." Chapter 2, the review of the literature, begins with a definition of spirituality, and then discusses articles under the following headings: coping skills, self-esteem, moral values, and negative aspects of religion. This literature suggests that the realm of spirituality can be used as a productive tool for maintaining mental health among those who are open to such a tool, but that care should be taken in respecting the beliefs and values of the individual. Chapter 3 discusses the use of spirituality as a tool for maintaining mental health, analyzing evidence found in the literature and offering an interpretation based on this analysis. Chapter 4 summarizes the work, drawing conclusions from the analysis and offering recommendations for further development. A four-page bibliography is included. (TE)

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Spiritual Centeredness as a Tool for Positive Mental Health

A Seminar Paper Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
Ohio University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

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July 1990

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Throughout untold centuries the realm of spirituality has provided humankind with a method of explaining and so more easily coping with numerous aspects of the world and life. The gods of choice range from primitive spirits of nature to modern day science, but whatever the object of interest, the purpose appears to be the same. Men and women turn to forces beyond themselves in search of explanations for aspects of their lives they cannot control.

In order to maintain a mentally healthy outlook on life, an individual needs to feel secure enough to take the type of risks which can lead to self-actualization. This process involves the establishment of goals, either positive or negative, which become targets for future accomplishment and motivate direction of growth (Witmer, 1989). Early spiritual experience and training may enhance this process, or it may emphasize the negative and so create barriers which can be difficult to overcome. Therefore it appears to be appropriate to study how various religious approaches can affect their adherents. It also seems reasonable to search for ways to use any potential nuturing powers of spirituality to aid in creating a more emotionally healthy environment for those who choose to seek their

answers in this area.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this study is to examine the relationship of spiritual centeredness to the development of positive self-concept and good mental health. Emphasis will be placed on the Judeo/Christian concept of spirituality, but other concepts will also be discussed. Three specific areas will be the focus of concentration in this study. Those are the areas of coping skills, self-concept, and values development.

Parker (1990) demonstrates a negative correlation between fundamentalist, dogmatic Christian beliefs and the development of ethical orientation. Hatcher and Underwood (1990) state that being mentally healthy is more the result of appropriate coping skills than lack of stress. They go on to state that strengthening one's resources for coping is the most practical method of dealing with stress. Aust (1990) points out ways in which the religious client can be aided toward therapeutic and spiritual growth by means of addressing religious issues. The church's power to aid in issues of mental health is addressed by Stephenson (1990), who urges African-American churches to make use of this power in helping youthful parishoners develop ethical and value judgement. These and other works reviewed

address the importance of spiritual attitudes in both their positive and negative aspects. A better understanding of this principle might lead to an understanding of how to present spiritual training in a way which would avoid dogmatic narrowness and increase one's resources for coping with life.

Purpose of the Study

Previous studies appear to concentrate on either the positives or the negatives of spiritual practice. Wilson (1977), writing on the benefits of salvation, emphasizes the positive aspects of the religious experience, while Ellis (1980) equates religious faith with emotional disturbance. In this study, an attempt will be made to recognize both positive and negative aspects of spiritual development and to suggest ways in which the positives can be enhanced while the negatives are de-emphasized.

Research Questions

1. How can spiritual centeredness be defined in broader terms for the non-religious individual?
2. What are some of the recognized positive and negative effects on mental health of various popular spiritual traditions outside the Judeo/Christian tradition?

3. What relationships, if any, are there between specific types of early spiritually-based training and negative religiosity?

4. Can a sense of spiritual well-being (or centeredness) help build positive self-concept?

5. Can a sense of spiritual well-being (or centeredness) improve an individual's ability to cope with life's difficulties?

6. How do spiritually oriented programs such as AA motivate participants? Is the spiritual aspect important, or is some other element responsible?

7. What types of early spiritually-based training appear to have positive effects on the average individual? What types seem more likely to have negative effects? What are some of these effects?

8. How does an internalized sense of spirituality affect self-concept and values development as opposed to an externalized sense of spirituality?

Assumptions

It is assumed that much of the available literature on spiritual issues is written from a somewhat biased viewpoint. Authors often appear to take sides on the issues in addressing questions of spirituality, especially in the context of specific religious beliefs and practices. Many works on

religious issues are written by theologians or individuals who declare themselves to be affiliated with a spiritual ideation. Others, such as Ellis (1980) and Walls (1980), direct their comments in rebuttal of the value of religion. These works sometimes appear to be an attempt to defend the personal point of view of the author and must be viewed in this light.

Deliminations

Included in this study will be those aspects of spiritual experience which are conducive to learning in the areas of coping skills, self-concept, and values development. This will also include aspects which appear to stunt learning processes. It will not deal with doctrinal issues except in cases where doctrine has a direct bearing on developing mental health skills.

Limitations

Literature available in the desired area tends to be broader based than might be prefered. Much of the desired material is found as secondary to the major theme of the available literature. Bergin (1980), for example, deals with the subject in a secondary manner while comparing religious and humanistic values. Ramm's (1975) work on the conversion of the youth

culture touches on spiritual effects on mental outlook, but concentrates on the motivation of the culture.

In addition, much of the material is written from a biased point of view, either pro- or anti-doctrinal, as was stated earlier.

Definition of Terms

Spirituality shall be defined as a belief in a force or being greater and more powerful than oneself (Witmer, 1989).

Positive self-esteem shall be defined as the acceptance of oneself as a person of worth with a sense of competence and/or control (Witmer, 1989).

Moral values shall be defined as those which guide behavior in acting for the individual's own well-being while demonstrating respect and compassion for the good of others (Witmer, 1985).

Procedure

Articles to be reviewed for this study were located in part through an ERIC search using the headings "Religion or Religious," "Mental Health," and "Education." The first search was limited to works published since 1980. As this produced less useful material than was hoped for, a further search was done for material from 1970 to present. The same headings were used in searching for literature in the

ALICE system of the Ohio University library. Additional literature was located in the private libraries of K.C. and Nora Stanger of Loveland, Ohio, and Rev. Dennis Strawn of Ironton, Ohio.

Further data was collected through interviews with Lt. Colonel Vance Houston, U.S.M.C., retired, who has studied the use of spiritual centeredness as a tool for maintaining a hold on sanity by prisoners of war in Viet Nam. Interviews were also conducted with Tim Adkins, a substance abuse counselor with Ironton's Family Guidance Clinic, and with three members of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous was also used to examine how this program uses spirituality as a counseling tool.

Organization of the Study

This study shall be organized into four chapters. The first is an attempt to explain the purpose of the study and to define the parameters. Included are the statement of the problem and the purpose, research questions to be answered, assumptions, deliminations, definition of terms, procedure, and organization of the study.

The second chapter includes a review of the literature used in attempting to answer the questions raised in the study. Appropriate headings and

subheadings are used for easier analysis of the material presented.

Chapter three includes discussion, analysis, and interpretation of the material reviewed.

Chapter four summarizes the study, explaining conclusions drawn and offering recommendations for further development in the area of the problem studied.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Human beings are set apart from the rest of the animal kingdom by their ability to reason and their will, concepts which "require a spiritual or psychic life to interact with the environment in a way that guarantees existance and achieves fuller development" (Witmer, 1989, p. 36). For many individuals, life's meaning is found in this psychic life, and the goals each person chooses determine the quality of the psychic life (Witmer, 1989). If this is true, it appears reasonable to study spirituality as one route to helping these individuals establish and maintain a state of good mental health. This study is concerned with three specific areas in which spirituality may serve as a tool for maintaining mental health. These areas are: (1) coping skills; (2) self-concept; and (3) values development.

Spirituality Defined

Before examining the value of the spiritual self to mental health maintenance, it is necessary to define the term spirituality as it is to be used in this study. Witmer (1989) defines spirituality as the belief in a force or being which is greater and more powerful than the individual. This belief leads the

believer to seek for a purpose or meaning in life. This is the goal of all the world's major religions (Witmer, 1989), but is not confined to those of a religious nature. Walls (1980), in his argument against including religious values in the therapeutic process, points to the humanistic search for purpose which does not necessarily include a belief in a supreme being. He states that "Knowledge involves a conscientious effort to understand reality, which ultimately rests on faith. Meaning and purpose require that reason, intuition, emotion, and compassion operate harmoniously" (p. 641). Thus, while disagreeing with Bergin (1980) who defines spirituality in the more narrow scope of theism, Walls continues to acknowledge the need for meaning and purpose in life which must be sought beyond the scope of the individual's primary level of conciousness.

Coping Skills

One measure of the mentally healthy individual is the ability to cope with the day-to-day stresses of life (Allen, 1983). Allen recognizes religion as one effective method of controlling stress and thus maintaining a healthy, well-adjusted life style. He acknowledges that this is an externally oriented method of maintaining control, a fact which appears to make it

less desirable to many. However, he states that "Even though it is externally oriented, faith in positive outcomes can be an adaptive cognitive attitude" (p. 47).

In a study of social skill development among parochial school students, fundamental Lutheran school students, state Lutheran school students and public school students conducted in this country and in Norway (Crandall & Gozali, 1969), it was discovered that students with stronger religious ties and training had developed more appropriate skills. It was suggested by the authors that one reason for this might be the coping mechanisms developed by these students. It is, however, also suggested that denial of negative behaviors in response to the stricter environment could also be responsible for the higher results in these children.

Just as social skills are one area of coping which must be faced, so is death a subject with which all humans must eventually deal. As death is, for many, a frightening aspect of life, thanatology, or death education, is increasingly being acknowledged as an appropriate area for consideration in attempting to improve mental health (Harris, 1978). In the philosophical approach to death education, life and

death become intermingled aspects of the human experience, with life's meaning recognizable only when one learns to understand and accept the reality of death (Harris, 1978). Attempts to come to this understanding include the Judeo/Christian belief that the body is a temporary shelter for the immortal soul. Another example of a religious convention which tries to explain death is the Buddhist contention, discussed by Kubler-Ross (1975), that each life is a preparation for rebirth. A variety of other philosophical attempts to make life meaningful in the recognition and acceptance of death include the existential view that reconciliation with death as an end to existenence is necessary for self-realization (Harris, 1978). While such an approach does not have the obvious religious brand of spirituality, it does encourage reaching beyond the ready conciousness to a deeper level of the human spirit for understanding and strength (Harris, 1978).

It is not only the philosophies of Western society which are of value in maintaining mental health. In addition to the Buddhist philosophy mentioned earlier, Yoga has become popular among a segment of modern society. Yoga, originally a philosophy intended to help its adherents achieve their true natures through

transcendence (Allen, 1983), is today practiced by many in Western society as a method of dealing with stress as well as a means of meditating for deeper understanding of the self. While it does include a series of exercises useful in stretching and relaxing the body, the essence of yoga is still found in its philosophical elements, which work on the body, mind and spirit in an effort to achieve self-realization (Allen, 1983).

Not all of the literature reviewed agreed, however, on the value of spirituality as a coping skill. Ellis (1980) states, "probabilistic atheists like myself...believe that since there is an exceptionally high probability that no gods or superhuman entities of any kind exist, we had better assume that they do not and live our lives according to this assumption" (p. 635).

Self-Esteem

As defined in Chapter One, positive self-esteem is the acceptance of oneself as a person of worth with a sense of competence and/or control (Witmer, 1989). It might be argued that the ideals held by the Judeo/Christian tradition might cause its adherants to feel a sense of failure as they fall short of those ideals (Nicholi II, 1974). However, in a study of

college students claiming to have had a conversion experience, Nicholi found that, while these students became more aware of their own shortcomings, they also found new resources for dealing with that knowledge which allowed them to become more forgiving of themselves. This in turn led to greater acceptance and the feeling of being able to deal competently in reducing feelings which had previously ranged from self-doubt to self-hatred (Nicholi II, 1974).

Wilson (1977), in a study of adults who had experienced religious conversion several years before being studied, found that most of his subjects described themselves before their conversions as confused, depressed, afraid, angry, or emotionally empty. Following conversion, these repondents developed a new view of themselves. They did not eliminate all negative feelings, but felt more competent in dealing with these feelings. They came to see themselves as more valuable people, better prepared to deal with life. In addition, other aspects of their lives which might be connected to self-esteem also improved. These included work performance, interpersonal relationships, and, for some, behavioral changes which helped them avoid legal entanglements (Wilson, 1977).

Benson and Spilka (1973) suggest that an individual's level of self-esteem can have an effect on the theological doctrine selected. An individual who has high self-esteem will be more likely to seek out religious affiliations which view God as a loving, benevolent force, while those with low self-esteem may feel uncomfortable with a doctrine which does not reinforce their self-image and so lean toward affiliatiors which emphasize the more judgemental, vindictive view of God (Benson & Spilka, 1973). The same study found evidence to suggest that an extrinsic religious attitude might be related to low self-esteem, although the exact relationship was not established.

Not all researchers find any positive relationship between self-esteem and spiritual conviction. Ellis (1980) states that, while some individuals who refuse to give up their absolutist forms of thinking may benefit from less dogmatic forms of religious practice, it is far more desirable and healthy to surrender all forms of religious belief, which are in Ellis's opinion forms of emotional disturbance.

Moral Values

Moral values have been defined as those which guide behavior in acting for the individual's own well-being while demonstrating respect and compassion

for the good of others (Witmer, 1985). This can be opposed to value systems which place priorities on personal needs and desires without concern for the needs and desires of others. (Clippinger, 1973).

Values are, according to Bergin (1980), an "inevitable and pervasive part of psychotherapy" (p. 97). In working toward change, the counselor and client must set goals which will be based on a values system acceptable to both as well as to the community in which they exist (Bergin, 1980). The values system of the counselor will influence the relationship, but must not be allowed to outweigh those of the client and/or the community. Even Ellis (1980) concedes that if the client insists on clinging to religious beliefs which the atheistic counselor feels are foolish and useless, that client may still be directed within the religious system to find a relatively healthy life style based on this irrational-thinking form of values.

The human being has a need for values, and failure to develop them can lead to such values related conditions as apathy, alienation, hopelessness and cynicism (Witmer, 1989). A values system should give the individual meaning, hope, and purpose in life, as well as a source for decision making and problem solving (Witmer, 1989). Religious affiliation is often

a primary source for developing such a system.

A study by Crandall and Gozali (1969) suggests that children from stricter religious backgrounds are more aware of the inappropriateness of certain behaviors, such as aggression toward others. Similarly, Wilson"s (1977) work with adults showed that those who experienced religious conversion developed behavioral changes more in accord with a code of values which they had frequently considered apparent but unimportant before their conversions. These behaviors included such things as sexual indiscretions, alcohol abuse, aggression, indiscriminate criticism of others, and, for at least one participant, unspecified illegal activities.

Malony (1972) points out that the value system of a Christian, as defined by scripture, consists of living a life of loving service based on faith. This system involves identifying with the needs of others and working to improve conditions for all. It also involves viewing the self as a child of God, and thus capable of acting in a manner which will achieve the desired conditions (Malony, 1972).

There have been arguments that the values related to religion are remnants of a useless past, found as a part of the controlling super-ego, but such arguments

focus only on the restricting facets of religious values. Others point to the moral values of religious life as ongoing structures of the ego, defining the adaptations used to appropriately govern human behavior (Clippinger, 1973).

In considering how the values systems of religious individuals actually determines their behavior, it is appropriate to consider intrinsic versus extrinsic religious orientation. Intrinsically oriented individuals tend to internalize the values and beliefs they hold, and live their lives accordingly. Extrinsically oriented individuals consider these values and beliefs to be utilitarian, a means for establishing social relationships, etc., and act on them only so long as they serve the expected purpose (Bergin, Stinchfield, Gaskin, Masters, & Sullivan, 1988). Those whose religious orientation is extrinsic tend to have a narrower view of religion, and their values appear to be harsher and less compromising, with less consideration for others (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Also working with various outlooks in the religious arena, Bock and Warren (1972) considered the possibility of using one's religious acceptance of authority to influence individuals to accept destructive demands from those they view as authority

figures. The experiment used was a reconstruction of Milgram's 1963 study, in which subjects were ordered to administer what they thought were increasingly powerful shocks to another. Bock and Warren (1972) expected to find that the most obedient subjects would be extreme believers or extreme non-believers, while moderate believers would resist the commands. This proved to be the reverse of what actually happened. The extremes, both believers and non-believers, proved to be more resistant to commands. It is suggested that these individuals must have arrived at strong moral commitments within themselves which allowed them to resist, while the moderates, comparable to the extrinsically oriented individuals of the Allport and Ross studies (1967) are more concerned with pleasing others by their behavior and so respond as ordered.

Negative Aspects of Religion

While there is much argument for the positive input of spiritual and religious experience for many individuals, the negative possibilities cannot be ignored. One such negative aspect was considered by Parker (1990) in a study of religious counselors. He found that individuals with a high level of dogmatic, fundmentalist orientation tended to display a lower level of ethical acuity, while the more liberal

believer appeared to display a higher level of ethical judgement. This seemed to suggest that the more fundamentalist approaches to religion can be expected to produce individuals who are less tolerant and narrower in world view.

Other studies (Allport & Ross, 1967; McClain, 1970; Bragin, 1977; Aust, 1990) have found evidence that the individual brings negative ideas and standards into a religious ideation, rather than receiving them. Allport and Ross (1967) suggest that it is the intrinsic or extrinsic orientation of the individual which results in positive or negative attributes such as unfair prejudices. Aust (1990) states that the individual who has developed negative attitudes can be redirected by use of more positive interpretations of the doctrine which has been used to support these negative attitudes.

For many individuals, the moral standards held by the religious affiliation of their choice may create conflicts within them which are difficult to handle. College students studied by Bergin and his associates (1988) reported a variety of negative defense mechanisms for dealing with guilt related to their falling short of church standards. These included denial, repression, rationalization, and reaction

formation. Crandall and Gozali (1969) suggested similar defenses in the children they studied, although their suggestion is based on their own expectations rather than report of subjects or those observing the subjects.

Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter seems to suggest that the realm of spirituality can be used as a productive tool for maintaining mental health for those who are open to such a tool. Care should be taken, however, in respecting the beliefs and values of the individual. If, as Ellis (1980) points out, the individual does not believe in a spiritual realm, such an approach should be avoided. If the individual has spiritual beliefs which are extrinsically oriented, these can be used to help the individual deal with problems (Aust, 1990; The Little Red Book, 1957), although care should be taken not to be too directive. If such care is not taken, the extrinsically oriented individual may abdicate personal responsibility in favor of following orders (Bock & Warren, 1972). The intrinsically oriented individual, on the other hand, may profit from the use of spiritually based programming when such programming is in agreement with the individual's beliefs (Allport &

Ross, 1967; Bergin, et al., 1988; Aust, 1990).

Chapter three will discuss the use of spirituality as a tool for maintaining mental health, analyzing the evidence found in the literature and offering an interpretation based on the results of this analysis. Chapter four will summarize the work considered in this paper, drawing conclusions from the analysis done in chapter three and making recommendations for future consideration.

CHAPTER THREE

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Chapter one presented the problem of this study as an examination of the relationship between spiritual centeredness and the development of positive self-concept and good mental health. It was noted that both positive and negative aspects of this relationship can be identified. The goal of this paper is to identify ways in which the positives can be emphasized and used as a tool for creating a mentally healthy environment for the spiritually oriented.

Chapter two reviewed literature in the area of religion and mental health. Chapter three will draw on this literature for a discussion and analysis of the problem, and to offer suggested interpretations of the literature presented. This analysis will be organized under the following headings:

1) Spirituality defined
2) Coping skills
3) Self-esteem
4) Moral values
5) Negative aspects of religion
6) Summary

Spirituality Defined

Spirituality in this study has been defined as a belief in a force or being greater and more powerful than oneself (Witmer, 1989). For some this is a God image, while for others it may be a cosmic force which keeps the universe in balance. Whatever the personal view, spirituality serves to give deeper meaning to life.

Coping Skills

Witmer (1988) points out that sources of spirituality can be internal as well as external. This is an important consideration in dealing with the value of the spiritual experience. Various authors (Allport & Ross, 1967; Benson & Spilka, 1973; Bergin, et al., 1988; Clippinger,1973; etc.) discussed the importance of intrinsic versus extrinsic religious orientation in establishing a healthy mental outlook. Those who look within themselves for spiritual resources, who internalize their beliefs and values and see themselves as responsible for their own spiritual growth, would seem to be better capable of facing day to day issues in a healthy manner. On the other hand, those who see a higher power as something removed from themselves might be expected to feel less secure in drawing on this power as a personal resource. Thus religion

becomes just one more external control, a means to an end which may have nothing to do with the religious experience.

Allport and Ross (1967) in their study of religion and prejudice, found that members of fundamentalist sects tended to be more often extrinsically oriented, and that with this extrinsic orientation went a higher incidence of prejudice against those who were different, including other racial, ethnic, and religious groups. One conclusion which might be drawn from this finding is that those with extrinsic orientation seem to feel a need for more narrowly drawn lines of control to define themselves in the light they desire. In this sense, it appears possible that religion becomes for them one more external locus of control, and so at best a fragile coping mechanism, as it may not serve the end they wish to reach in many cases.

Those who have developed a more internalized sense of spirituality, on the other hand, appear to be better equiped to use this sense as a coping mechanism in meeting daily stresses. In a study by Bock and Warren (1972), the participants who were most intrinsic in their beliefs (whether those beliefs were religious or anti-religious) were willing to oppose authority

figures when they felt the commands given were wrong. The authors feel that this is related to the internalization of beliefs and values. Of the study's subjects, the intrinsically oriented group had already developed the ability to make decisions while developing the values they had internalized. In so doing, they had learned to trust their own judgement and were able to generalize this in making the decision to refuse the commands of an authority figure.

It must be acknowledged at this point that, whether or not religious beliefs are internalized, the basic source of power from a religious view remains an external force. While intrinsically motivated believers find personal strength and a sense of control through the God of their choice (Benson & Spilka, 1973), that personal strength still comes from an external source. Allen (1983), in his work on stress control, states that such an external source can offer a sense of peace and security which leads to a very healthy life style. Ellis (1980), on the other hand, feels that this externally oriented faith, which he terms a form of emotional disturbance, should be discouraged in its most dogmatic forms and tolerated in the more liberal believer. He agrees that the more liberal believer can live in a state of relative

health, but would benefit more by ridding themselves of their irrational beliefs.

The work of Bock and Warren (1972) points out the value of internalized strengths. If in fact spiritual strength is external, Ellis' (1980) point may be well taken. However, it should also be noted that for many intrinsically oriented individuals, the God-image is not only an external force, but a personal entity which transcends such concepts, so that the individual feels a part of the force (Bergin, 1980), and spirituality becomes a part of the whole person (Witmer, 1989).

It is, of course, to be expected that no individual will be totally intrinsic in religious orientation (Benson & Spilka, 1973). It might also be reasoned that no individual is totally intrinsic in control. It seems apparent that all individuals existing in a social setting must be influenced from time to time by outside controls. It might even be argued that some of these external controls are at times a comfort to most individuals. In the same way, many religiously oriented persons are aided by the rules of their religion in dealing with problems by simply being able to feel that the answer lies in the standards of the religious conviction (Wilson, 1977).

Spirituality as an external motivator should not be immediately dismissed. T. Adkins (personal communication, June 5, 1990), an alcohol counselor, states that the role of a spiritual force which can aid the recovering alcoholic is a basis for much of the success of the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) program. The alcoholic often feels powerless against the addiction, and the belief in a force beyond the self which will give support and comfort through the recovery process offers a motivation which for many could not be found elsewhere. The Twelve Steps followed by members of AA and its associated services lean heavily on the belief that there is a greater power to whom the afflicted individual may turn for help in dealing with addiction (The Little Red Book, 1957). For individuals such as those in AA, who are struggling with physical or psychological addiction, an external locus of control for the destructive behaviors associated with the addiction seems to be, at least part of the time, an essential tool. If for some the source of control is "God, as we understand him" (The Little Red Book, 1957, p. 166), and if this is an effective control for this serious form of negative behavior, it would appear only right to encourage the continuation of the use of this tool.

Spiritual support is not, it must be noted, merely to be used as a crutch for the weak, but surely when such a crutch is needed, it has been shown to be effective. In a recent talk, Lt. Colonel Vance Houston (personal communication, July 1, 1990), U.S.M.C., retired, spoke of his experiences with Viet Nam prisoners of war, who had spent various periods of years in torturous conditions. The vast majority of the men he had spoken with reported holding onto their sanity through a shared spiritual relationship. Often this sharing was done with men they could not see, and occasionally with men who were no longer present, but who had left their messages drawn on the walls of tiny cells to be found by following prisoners. In such harsh conditions as were faced by these men, the coping "crutch" of spiritual contact and faith was often the only available aid. Apparently for many it was the crutch they needed.

Much of the literature dealt with coping skills as they are aided by spirituality. Even Ellis (1980), who was opposed to the use of spiritual or religious beliefs on the grounds that they are forms of irrational thinking, agreed that with certain individuals these beliefs could be an effective tool for coping with problems. There was less agreement

within the literature on other areas considered in this study.

Self-Esteem

Positive self-esteem has been defined as the acceptance of oneself as a person of worth with a sense of competence and/or control (Witmer, 1989). The question might be raised, if one attributes cosmic control to a spiritual force, how can that person then maintain a sense of personal control? From the literature reviewed it seems evident that there are those who do surrender personal control in adopting a spiritual attitude. These persons, according to Benson and Spilka (1973) are usually persons who, before entering into a spiritual or religious affiliation, have a low level of self esteem. They therefore seek out affiliations which will support their present estimate of themselves. They often join churches which present God as an angry, vindictive force seeking to punish and viewing humanity as creatures of little value. This God-image reinforces the self-image to which they have grown accustomed and does not demand that they grow or change.

The individual who, on the other hand, has a higher self-esteem when choosing a religious affiliation tends to seek out one which presents a

loving, accepting, growth-encouraging God-image (Bock & Spilka). Such an individual is more likely to internalize spiritual beliefs. Internalization or intrinsic orientation in believers tends to lead to a greater acceptance not only of the self, but also of others (Allport & Ross, 1967). These individuals do not use their religion a a shield against the world, nor as a weapon to tear down the defenses of others. They are more likely to view religion as an end in itself, a basis for a life style free from many the self-imposed restrictions of the extrinsically oriented individual, especially when that individual suffers from lower self-esteem (Bergin, et al., 1988).

It would seem that, when an individual suffering from lower self-esteem is spiritually oriented, exploration of a more positive God-image might help that individual develop an improved self-image as well (Aust, 1990). There is a danger among many therapists of approaching these clients with an attitude of disrespect for the belief system embraced. Psychologists are more likely to relate to a scientific point of view than a religious one (Bergin, 1980). Such an attitude, rather than helping these clients, may alienate them or, worse, leave them more vulnerable than before by destroying a primary support system

(Aust, 1990).

It seems appropriate to consider at this point what type of religious affiliation is most appropriate for the development of positive mental health. This is an area where care must be taken, as denominational lines may be matters of strong feeling for many individuals, and it seems unfair to state, as Ellis (1980) does about all religious belief, that adherants of specific doctrine are, by virtue of their religious affiliation, emotionally disturbed. Nevertheless, it does appear that the disturbed client is more likely to continue in a disturbed state when affiliated with a denomination or religion which encourages denial of personal responsibility or relies heavily on external controls. Religions which discourage cognative examination of faith while exploiting emotionalism seem most likely to exacerbate existing emotional disturbances. Whether they actually foster such disturbances is a matter which deserves further study.

It should be noted that the literature used in considering the effect of spirituality on self-esteem consisted mainly of opinion (Bergin, 1980; Benson & Spilka, 1973; Bragin, 1977; etc.). Self-esteem material was mentioned as secondary to the main thrust of the research in question when drawn from research

reports (Allport & Ross, 1967; Bergin, et al., 1988; Bock & Warren, 1972; etc.). In addition, the material which did deal with self-esteem frequently reflected admitted prejudices on the part of individual authors (Bergin, 1980; Ellis, 1980; Wall, 1980; Malony, 1972; etc.).

Moral Values

This study has defined moral values as those which guide behavior in acting for the individual's own well-being while demonstrating respect and compassion for the good of others (Witmer, 1985). The teachings of all the world's great religions encourage attitudes of warmth, compassion, and brotherhood, at least within the ranks of their own believers (Allport & Ross, 1967). The Judeo/Christian tradition is one of benevolant acceptance of all humanity, yet the reality among individual denominational groups does not always meet this ideal.

Allport and Ross (1967) found high rates of prejudice against other ethnic and racial groups among extrinsically oriented fundamentalist Christians. This group was found to be more likely to use their religious affiliation to establish such inner defenses as a sense of power, security, self-justification, status, and social contact. Religion for this

individual is a utilitarian facet of life, and as such the values drawn from it appear to be accepted with less consideration than might be desired. Accepting these values makes life easier, placing fewer demands on the individual by offering an external locus of control for reference.

Bock and Warren (1972) had similar results in their experiment with obedience to destructive commands. Those who appeared to be more extrinsically oriented were quicker to accept the authority of the experimenter, while the intrinsically oriented subjects were more likely to rely on internalized values and reject commands which did not mesh with those values. It is suggested in the results of this study that one who has taken a definite stand on religious issues feels comfortable in making other decisions as well, while those who continue to rely on external controls avoid decision making, prefering to defer to the authority of others.

While it may be preferable to internalize one's value system, the new convert to a religious affiliation may often benefit from the rules laid out by the denomination if those rules place a value on appropriate aspects of life. The conversion experience may lead to better regulating one's life, to the extent

in some cases of turning individuals away from questionable or illegal behaviors (Wilson, 1977). However, to be of lasting value to the individual, the belief system should be internalized (Allport & Ross, 1967; Benson & Spilka, 1973). Considering this, it would appear that the spiritual program which encourages internalization of values would be of longer lasting benefit than those which are more authoriatrian in nature. It must, however, be noted that there are those among the fundamentalist, more authoritarian believers who also are intrinsic in their beliefs (Allport & Ross, 1967). It is the client who tends to externalize in other areas who might benefit from being steered in the direction of more open spiritual attitudes.

It should be noted that many clients who enter psychotherapy come not looking for cures, but seeking meaning in their lives (Bergin, 1980). Among these clients can be found those with religious or other spiritual ties who are not certain how this spirituality relates to them personally. They may attempt through therapy to find meaning from spirituality, and a therapist who allows this process to take place in a supportive, nonjudgemental environment may facilitate the internalization of

needed values (Aust, 1990).

When the therapist's values differ from those being considered by the client, this may be a difficult process. Bergin (1988) suggests that the therapist should consider how the client's values compare with the community's values, as opposed to those held by the therapist. Ellis (1980) refutes this, stating that the average therapist, by reason of the vocation chosen, should have a better grasp of what values are appropriate. Ellis does acknowledge the acceptablity of religious beliefs, if not too extreme, in clients who refuse to surrender these beliefs, but feels that these beliefs should not be encouraged and in fact should be discouraged whenever possible.

Again, much of the literature on the development of values as this relates to spirituality is based on opinion, and the opinions of various authors can differ widely. Bergin (1980) in his earlier work suggests that religious faith is necessary for the growth of moral values, while Walls (1980) points to the high, spiritually oriented values of the average clinical humanist. Ellis (1980) argues that the development of moral values is in no way related to spiritual issues, pointing to the fact that probabilistic atheists have similar moral values to spiritually oriented

individuals, with the exception of those relating to religion.

Negative Aspects of Religion

It does seem that certain types of religious practice can encourage believers to become or remain dependent on authority figures (Bock & Warren, 1972; Allport & Ross, 1967; Benson & Spilka, 1973). Fundamentalist denominations which present an image of God as cold, angry and impersonal encourage believers to see themselves as less worthy and deserving of punishment (Benson & Spilka, 1973). A controlling God-image encourages the the individual to feel incompetent in effecting social change (Benson & Spilka, 1973). These individuals see their fates as a matter of luck or chance, and themselves as helpless to control their own destinies. For many of these individuals, the idea of placing their lives in God's hands appears to be merely another method for not accepting personal responsibility.

McClain (1970) states that those who regularly attend church tend to show a higher incidence of authoritarianism, dependency, rigidity, conventionalism and prejudice. He adds that those who score higher on extrinsic scales of religious value tend to be more frequent church attenders. There is also, he notes,

evidence that altruism and a sense of meaning in life were associated with regular attendance, while prejudice was higher in those who attended irregularly. This last finding was opposed to findings by Allport and Ross (1967), but did not take into consideration the effects of intrinsic/extrinsic orientation, which was the basis of much of Allport's and Ross's work.

It has also been noted that individuals with low self-esteem may tend to seek out spiritual affiliations which will reinforce the poor self-image already established (Benson & Spilka, 1973). Thus those who might need the most encouragement in developing personal strengths are most likely to seek out philosophies which will be of least help to them.

Ellis (1980) refers to religious belief as irrational thinking and a form of emotional disturbance. Wilson (1977), too, points out that many of the aspects of religious conversion which are felt by the convert to be the most positive aspects of the event are usually considered by psychiatrists to be pathological in nature. These attitudes can present a further difficulty for individuals who seek a spiritual life-style. They may find that support for their chosen way of life is lacking outside of established institutions, and many intrinsically oriented believers

are not affiliated with institutions (Allport & Ross, 1967). Furthermore, those extrinsically oriented individuals who, in seeking support, turn to more orthodox or fundamentalist institutions, may find that to maintain the belief system they have chosen to adopt they must limit their interactions to those who are more accepting of this belief system (Wilson, 1977). This would certainly eliminate the likelihood of seeking counseling from individuals whose value system rejected acceptance of spiritual beliefs.

Summary

It appears fair to state that the spiritual orientation of an individual can be an important aspect to consider when attempting to help that individual develop a means of maintaining mental health. Equal importance should apparently be given to the intrinsic/extrinsic orientation of the client, and care taken not to abuse any additional authority an extrinsic orientation might allow the counselor (Bock & Warren, 1972). As Aust (1990) suggests, the counselor who develops an understanding of a clients belief system can then use that system to help the client find new and better ways of coping. It seems equally apparent that great care must be taken in dealing with individual biases and personal belief systems. To work

in opposition to the spiritual orientation of an individual may result in discouraging that individual from seeking help (Aust, 1990).

Chapter four will summarize this study, draw conclusions from the literature reviewed, and offer suggestions for future study. It seems apparent that the area of spirituality in relationship to mental health leaves a number of unanswered questions which would be appropriate for research. However, the elimination of personal biases in approaching such studies may be difficult. As a result, it seems likely that many questions may never find answers which will be acceptable throughout our society.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS

The problem of this study has been to examine the relationship of spiritual centeredness to positive self-concept and good mental health. The literature reviewed has offered differing views on this relationship. Ellis (1980) sees it as a disturbed relationship based on faulty thinking. Bergin (1980) considers it a positive relationship, offering divine support for the lost individual. Others move along a continuum of opinions between these extremes, citing both positives and negatives in the relationship. These polar effects appear to be dependent on the individual's method of dealing with beliefs and values. The internally controlled individual appears more likely to maintain a spiritual life conducive to positive self-concept and good mental health. The externally controlled individual appears more likely to adopt religious attitudes which are pathological in nature and of less positive value. The challenge, then, would appear to be to develop a way to offer to those spiritually inclined individuals with external controls a form of spiritual support which meets their spiritual requirements while encouraging a move toward internal control and more positive self-concept.

This chapter will attempt to answer the questions posed at the beginning of the study. Answers will be based on the literature reviewed (chapter three) and the analysis of that literature (chapter four).

Spirituality Defined

The first question posed by this study was stated as follows: how can spiritual centeredness be defined in broader terms for the non-religious individual? Spirituality for the purpose of this study has been defined as a belief in a force or being greater and more powerful than oneself (Witmer, 1989). For some this is a God image, while for others it may be a cosmic force which keeps the universe in balance. Whatever the personal view, spirituality serves to give deeper meaning to life. To be comfortable with one's spiritual orientation, thus centered in that area of one's life, appears to require an intrinsic orientation (Allport & Ross, 1967). However, even an extrinsic orientation to spirituality appears to be an effective tool in maintaining mental health if approached appropriately (Aust, 1990).

Effects of Traditions other than Judeo/Christian

The second question posed in this study was, what are some of the recognized positive and negative effects on mental health of various popular spiritual

traditions outside the Judeo/Christian tradition? The literature reviewed dealt with the positive aspects of Hatha Yoga in dealing with stress (Allen, 1983), as well as the use by Kubler-Ross of Buddhist teachings in helping clients accept death (Kubler-Ross, 1975). Allen (1983), however, also points out the dangers of practicing certain methods in Yoga, including dangers to one's mental health. These result from approaching the techniques with limited understanding. Yoga is a philosophy which stands in almost direct contrast to many of the concepts most valued by Western culture, such as competition and the desire for quick results.

It appears from the material that Western attitudes can make the practice of Eastern philosophies difficult, frustrating, and even harmful if too much demand is placed on the physical aspects of those philosophies too quickly. However, if practiced in the proper manner, these techniques and philosophies can be excellent coping mechanisms (Allen, 1983).

Relationships between Early Training and Negative Religiousity

What relationships, if any, are there between specific types of early spiritual-based training and negative religiousity? The literature reviewed did not directly answer this question. It is reasonable,

however, to assume from the literature that if a relationship exists between the negative religiousity seen in many pathlgical clients and any specific type of religious training, it might be sought first among the more authoritarian, dogmatic, fundamentalist denominations (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Bock & Warren, 1972; Allport & Ross, 1967.) However, it seems more likely that the pathologically religious individual seeks out these particular denominations rather than becoming pathological as a result of their doctrines. It does not, therefore, appear appropriate to attempt to establish a relationship between denomination and attitude. Perhaps a more profitable study would be one which attempted to discover what types of experience encourage intrinsic orientation toward spiritual and other values.

Spiritual-Centeredness and Self-Concept

Can a sense of spiritual well-being (or centeredness) help build positive self-concept? It would appear that the individual with a higher level of self-esteem is more likely to hold spiritual values which are less dogmatic and more universally compassionate. Whether this higher self-esteem grows out of the spiritual outlook, or is in fact responsible for seeking out a more accepting, less authoritarian

form of spirituality is unclear (Benson & Spilka, 1973). It does seem, however, that having developed such a spiritual outlook, the individual finds maintaining higher self-esteem an easier task.

This is an area which seems to warrant further consideration. If a relationship between self-esteem and specific types of spiritual attitude could be established, this might be a relationship which could be generalized to other areas in working on self-concept (Aust, 1990).

Spiritual-Centeredness and Coping Skills

Can a sense of spiritual well-being (or centeredness) improve an individual's ability to cope with life's difficulties? It has been shown that individuals are capable of drawing on spiritual beliefs in helping them cope with a variety of problems. In learning to face death (Harris, 1978), dealing with addictions (Nicholi II, 1974)), or simply developing a code for relating with others (Wilson, 1977), spiritual centeredness offers a basis for developing coping skills. It appears that the intrinsically oriented individual as a rule has better coping skills, but again it is not certain whether this is due to spiritual factors, or whether personality factors which inspire the internalizing of spiritual beliefs also

enable the individual to cope well.

Here again there seems to be sufficient reason to consider further the relationship between spiritual beliefs and coping skills. While intrinsically oriented individuals appear to have better general coping skills, spiritual approaches have been shown to provide motivation to the extrinsically oriented individual who needs an outside control (Crandall & Gozali, 1969; Stephenson, 1990). If indeed the intrinsically oriented individual copes well because of personality traits, the extrinsically oriented individual may have the greater need for coping techniques offered by spiritual institutions and programs.

Motivation through Spirituality

How do spiritually oriented programs such as AA motivate participants? Is the spiritual aspect important, or is some other element responsible? While the individual who has internalized values appears to be better able to grow spiritually (Allport & Ross, 1967), externally oriented persons can benefit from the standards set by various religions. When an individual has surrendered personal control, as in an addiction situation, spiritually oriented motivators appear to be effective (Wilson, 1977). When attending

a meeting of any AA association or reading any of the pamphlets or books released by these organizations, it is difficult to ignore the strong reliance on spirituality. However, it seems that the communion with others who share a common experience may be as important an aspect as the spiritual experience.

Interviews with individuals who have profited from AA and other spiritually supportive programs have offered evidence of a comfort coming from such support which might not be offered by a non-spiritual program. However, these are subjective reports, limited in number and scope. Further study in this area might provide interesting material as to the way these individuals are motivated.

Effects of Various Types of Early Religious Training

What types of of early spiritually-based training appear to have positive effects on the average individual? What types seem to have more negative effects? What are some of those effects? Again the literature appears to be uncertain of the relationship between types of religious training and eventual orientation or personality development. It appears likely that a more liberal spiritual background would encourage intrinsic orientation, but this is not always the case, just as more orthodox training does not

always result in externalization (Allport & Ross, 1967) or rebellion against the religion of background (Bergin, et al., 1988). What might be a better question for exploration would be, what types of spiritual affiliation are willing or capable of encouraging the development of intrinsic attitudes in its adherents?

Internalized versus Externalized Spirituality

How does an internalized sense of spirituality affect self-concept and values development as opposed to an externalized sense of spirituality? The literature seems to agree on the desirablity of an internalized or intrinsic orientation. Internally oriented individuals appear to have higher self-esteem and stronger inner resources for dealing with situations (Bock & Warren, 1973; Parker, 1990; Clippinger, 1973). Externally oriented persons are more likely to display narrow, negativistic attitudes toward both themselves and others (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Recommendations

It is difficult to remove all bias from studies of a spiritual or religious nature. Adherents of the various world religions and their denominations, whether intrinsically or extrinsically oriented, may

feel compelled to resent or resist too objective a study of what is a very subjective field. Non-believers may take too lightly the aspects of spirituality which may seem to them fantastic or mystical in proportions too far removed from their own reality. And yet spiritual or religious influences can be and are used in helping individuals cope with life in positive, constructive ways.

It is interesting to note that some individuals feel trapped by their faith (Bragin, 1977), while others tend to feel freed by it (Wilson, 1977). Further study into styles of religious training seem appropriate to enable individuals to choose appropriate support systems in developing their own spiritual growth program. Consideration would, of course, have to be given to the possibility that the system is not responsible for the outcome of its members, but that specific personality types may seek out systems which complement pre-existing attitudes (Benson & Spilka, 1973).

The spiritual life of individuals in today's society can be a tool for assisting these individuals in achieving and maintaining good mental health. It apparently does serve this purpose for many. However, the exact method by which it works, or the reason it is

viewed by different individuals in such different ways, cannot be determined by the present literature. A long term study of individuals within liberal and orthodox religious settings, as well as of individuals with no special affiliation but definite personal spiritual views might prove interesting and constructive, but short term studies are too ephimeral to be of use in developing spiritual programs which could encourage intrinsic attitudes (which appear to be more desirable for positive self-concept and mental health).

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